

# MORAL ADVOCATE.

## SUPPLEMENTARY TO NO. VI. VOLUME II.

### *An Address to the Ministers of the Gospel, of every denomination.*

In an attempt to improve the moral condition of mankind, the ministers of the Gospel, present themselves as the first agents to be enlisted in the cause. It would be casting an injurious imputation on the christian religion, to suppose that the ambassadors of Jesus Christ, will not feel a deep interest in every thing that is calculated to promote the honor of God, and the happiness of his rational creatures—to suppose that the spirit of the Gospel does not oppose that torrent of depravity which now inundates the nations of the earth, spreading violence, discord, rapine and every evil work over the noblest part of creation. The imputation cannot lie against the Gospel; and I appeal to you, to test the question, whether or not it shall lie against those, who take upon themselves to expound the doctrines of christianity.

It is fit that you should hold an eminent station among the benefactors of mankind: that you should stand as examples to the rest of the community. for sympathy with suffering human nature, for a deep and reverent regard for the honor of God, and for a promptness to relieve the one, and support the other.

It is from a high sense that I have of the dignified vocation of a gospel minister, that I have been induced to address you, in a particular manner; and call your attention to the subject of war. It would be an unnecessary waste of time, were I to undertake to prove to you, that the Dispensation of the Gospel is a system of universal benevolence—that the precepts of our Lord and Saviour bear the most conclusive marks of meekness, charity and love—of nonresistance and patience under injuries, and that the *ONLY* retaliation which is warranted by them is—“GOOD for evil.” These are prominent features of the Gospel. They are recorded in such legible characters that he who runs may read. Your acquaintance with ecclesiastical history will preclude the necessity of taking up time to inform you, that the primitive christi-

ans did not bear arms. You know that the practice of war was not introduced till the apostacy had begun; and that it did not become common till the church had totally lost her primitive purity. Nor is it necessary for me to go into a very detailed examination of what happens in the prosecution of *all wars*, to convince you that the practice is not only inseparable from crime and misery, but by far the most prolific source of depravity and wretchedness, existing in our miserable world. You cannot but deplore the sacrifice of human life—the misery of those who languish under wounds—or grieve for the loss of friends. But above all, you cannot feel indifferent on the contemplation of the vast amount of wickedness, that forms the grand counterpart of the evils of war. We cannot form a correct idea of one single battle, nor indeed of one single encampment, without some painful reflection. There is something always incorporated with the scene, offensive to God and distressing to the best feelings of the Christian. Where is the mind that can contemplate the approach of hostile armies, or survey the field of battle, covered with the mangled remains of beings formed for Heaven, without feelings of deep regret—without the most full conviction that such was not the object for which we were created, and dropping a tear over these sad evidences of human depravity & degradation? We may well exclaim alas! poor human nature! And where shall we find a remedy? Or who shall interpose as ministering angels, to speak peace to a fallen, miserable world? The remedy, my friends, is provided in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His ministers are the proper messengers of his Love, and of those glad tidings “which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and were confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”

I am aware that we are all frail and fallible creatures. We are wonderfully under the influence of education, and our moral vision is easily obscured by the mists of prejudice, and (to use a rhetorical figure) the clouds of dust which arise from the broad, beaten track of mankind.

It is equally obvious to the reflecting mind, that the developements of divine knowledge have been gradual. This truth, so abundantly confirmed by Sacred History, and by the individual experience of mankind, may serve as an admonition to us, to guard against tenaciously adhering to opinions, because they have been adopted by us or our forefathers.

I do not make these observations either to implicate the motives or wound the feelings of any: but to impress on your minds the necessity of a frequent recurrence to first principles. You know that even within the last century, religious intolerance was the order of the day. Men mistook for zeal that spirit which prompted them to suppose they could render God service, by punishing their fellow men. Every society in its turn, felt the vengeance of persecuting zeal: and few, very few, when an opportunity offered, were not drawn into an indulgence of it. You see, and I trust you rejoice to see, that this persecuting spirit is receding before the light of the Gospel. But what shall we say of the darkness of that delusion, or the fallacy of the reasoning by which it was attempted to defend it? How vain, how absurd was the idea that the safety of the church depended on the sword of the Law! The whole of that miserable policy was founded on a disbelief in the Providence and Attributes of the Supreme Being. The case to which your attention is now invited, is connected with ideas not less contracted respecting Divine Providence, nor less erroneous so far as they have reference to the Divine Attributes. Indeed it is a case so clear, that future generations may justly look back with astonishment, that it ever should be necessary to make an appeal to the ministers of the Gospel, in order to induce them to withhold their countenance from a practice so incompatible with the precepts of Jesus Christ, and destructive of morality and human happiness. Yet such is the melancholy fact. From that period when Constantine bribed the visible Church, with the honors and emoluments of secular power, down to the present day, the attempt has been perseveringly continued, to effect a compromise between the maxims of human policy, and the precepts of the Gos-

pel. The doctrines of christianity have been explained in such a manner, as to give full latitude to the most ambitious invaders of the rights of man, and destroyers of life, morality and happiness! Succeeding generations have inherited the delusion of their predecessors, and transmitted the innovations to those who looked up with veneration to *them*. While some who hold the sacerdotal character have silently looked on upon this miserable state of things—have quietly beheld the sanguinary tide of war, sweeping from the earth whatever was dear to man and pleasing in the sight of Heaven, there have been others who converted the pulpit into an engine of destruction, and sung thanksgiving over the most shocking scenes of carnage!!

If we compare the grand objects of the Gospel Dispensation with the present condition of Christendom—if we reflect that the Gospel proposes the restoration of a fallen world, and in the language announced at its introduction; Glory to God in the highest—on earth peace, good will among men, and then advert to the ground now occupied by the professors of this system of peace and good will, we may well adopt the language of the prophet “Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

It is the peculiar objects of Redeeming Love, to subdue the passions and remove the depravity of the human heart—to turn us from darkness to light, and bring us from under the power of Satan into the kingdom of the dear son of God. It is designed to restore man to the dignity of his original character, when he was a little lower, and perhaps but a little lower than the angels. Like its divine Author, it stands eternally opposed to every grade of corruption, and every system which involves in its consequences, the dishonor of God or the destruction of human happiness.

And here I will take occasion to remark, that human happiness is one of the grand objects proposed by revealed religion. Every restriction imposed upon us by the Gospel, tends to enlarge the sphere of our enjoyments, and give us those which are pure and permanent, in exchange for those which are only delu-



sive. Even the deepest humiliation and abasement of the Christian, result in a dignity and exaltation, in compassion with which, the splendour of wealth and the pomp of power, sink into poverty and meanness.

To you, who believe yourselves called to represent, to mankind, the excellences of the Gospel, under whatever profession you may go, I conceive a very forcible appeal should be made. We are not called to support the pride of opinion, or the errors of darker times, but to maintain the Faith once delivered to the saints, and to represent the Gospel Dispensation, in all its genuine purity and excellence, as it was introduced by its Divine Author. We are bound to this by the most solemn obligations: by the love, the reverence and obedience we owe to God; by the feelings of gratitude for his unspeakable favors to us—by the common sympathies of our nature, and by that superior principle of Love, which prompts us to desire the happiness of the whole human race, and binds, or would bind, us together in the bonds of brotherhood.

Our Lord and Saviour, when he personally appeared among men, to introduce a dispensation worthy of himself, borrowed none of his precepts from the maxims of human policy. He consulted none of the princes, heroes or philosophers of that day. His doctrines propose no compromise with depravity; but clothed in their own authority and dignity, they demand the admiration & obedience of mankind. But how has the name of Christ, been blasphemed among the heathen, in consequence of the adulteration of these doctrines! Most gladly would I mitigate the charge, but how can it be done, when the wars which desolate christendom, and the crimes and miseries which are inseparably connected with those wars, give occasion even to the heathen, to reproach the christian character, as less moral, less merciful, less happy, and less rational in their ideas of a Deity than themselves?

The subject is one of distressing magnitude, and I intreat you not to pass lightly over it. Rest not in a state of apathy and ease, in the quiet enclosures of your respective flocks. For your own individual share in the consequences of

the course you may pursue—for the sake of the present and eternal happiness of mankind at stake—for the love of Jesus Christ, and the honor of his name, arise to the watch tower to which you are called, and speak the pure language of the Gospel.

The apostles, when sent forth as lambs among wolves, to preach the Gospel of Peace and Salvation, carried with them nothing but the precepts and spirit of their divine Master. They took no part in the schemes of ambition and deeds of violence, that were going on around them. "The weapons of their warfare, were not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds—casting down imaginations, and bringing every thought into obedience to Christ." It was these spiritual weapons, and the excellence of the new Dispensation—the meekness, charity and love, which adorned the lives of the primitive believers, that drew thousands and tens of thousands "as doves to their windows." They were emphatically a family of Love. Nor was that love confined to themselves. They had been instructed by their Lord and Master to love their enemies; and given to understand that their very adoption as children of our Father who is in Heaven, depended on their observance of this precept.

It was in that very discourse of our Lord, to which I have alluded, and in immediate connection with the precept before us, that he declared: "Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of Heaven."

To you therefore, my Christian friends, who believe yourselves called to the dignified work of the ministry, the enquiry becomes one of a very solemn nature. Solemn it is to all who profess the name of Christ, but to you it is so in a peculiar manner. If you are made stewards of the manifold grace of God—if the important truths of the Messiah's peaceful kingdom, have been committed to you, what an awful responsibility must rest upon you! And how will you answer in the day of final inquiry, if the dishonor of God, and the blood of your fellow men, should stand charged against you!

You cannot suspect me of an attempt

to excite the idle fears of superstitious minds. You know that the majesty of God, & the terrors of his judgments, are not cunningly devised fables: and that no human titles or distinctions—nor ‘rocks, nor mountains,’ can hide the transgressor ‘from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne.’

It is in vain for you to think of applying palliative remedies to an evil so inveterate, and so enormous in magnitude, as that to which your attention is called. It is time the axe should be laid to the root of the corrupt tree. “By their fruits ye shall know them.” If you examine the branches of this tree, you will find them loaded with fraud, rapine, violence and blood. No breezes fan it, but the breath of anguish or the gusts of fury—No dew rests upon it, but the tears of widows and of orphans: and demons, like birds of prey, find shelter in its foliage. Where then is the alternative, or how shall the servants of Christ, not reciprocate the language of their Master, in that sentence: “It shall be hewn down, and cast into the fire.”

Come then, and let us unite in the bands of Gospel Love. Lend the aid of your talents and your influence, that “the kingdoms of this world, may become the kingdoms of our Lord and his Christ, and that he may reign over them for ever and ever.” You know that this cannot be fulfilled, while Wars prevail—and you must concur with me in believing, that of all the human family, Christians are most bound to promote this glorious state of things—that if they are christians indeed, they will make an approximation towards its accomplishment, at least so far as their lives, their precepts and influence will go: and of Christians, the ministers are most solemnly bound to realize this happy state in themselves, and promote it in the world. However we may be divided on doctrinal points, still let us so harmonise on those great principles which immediately involve the honor of God, and the happiness of his rational creatures, that it may justly be said “One is your master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren.”

ED.

### EDUCATION.

My female readers have already

been invited to lend the aid of their talents and influence to the promotion of peace and humanity. The present state of society calls loudly for a reformation. Scarcely a day but brings us some melancholy account of human depravity: some murder, daring robbery, or other atrocious crimes. When the virtuous principle is once prostrated, it too often happens that reformation is a vain and fruitless attempt. Against such individuals, the laws, whether sanguinary or humane, oppose but a feeble defence around the persons and property of the community. It is on individual virtue alone, that we can rely for the *prevention* of crimes. It is certainly a maxim of true wisdom, to: “Bring up a child in the way he should go, & when he is old he will not depart from it.” This simple, obvious truth, as to the great majority of cases, should be borne in mind by parents, if they have any regard for the happiness of their children, or the public prosperity. And indeed their own comfort is very deeply concerned in the faithful discharge of the important trust, committed to their care.

Although we cannot confer Grace on our offspring, or *ensure* their future happiness, yet the good or evil course of life, which men pursue, is much more dependent on the early habits, which are formed under parental influence, than we generally suppose. I have used the term *influence*, because it may present, a train of ideas, that are not sufficiently indulged.

*Parental influence* is a powerful agent in the formation of the manners and principles of mankind. There are, I am persuaded, many pious parents, who deeply deplore the misconduct of their children—who have painfully and labourously endeavoured to train them to virtue, but have had the mortification to see their fondest expectations blasted. And yet, they might trace the errors of their children to